

NIH Director's Pioneer Award

Frequently Asked Questions

2006 NIH Director's Pioneer Awards *New!*

Will NIH Director's Pioneer Awards be awarded again in 2006?

Yes, NIH will announce another competition of the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards in 2006. The Notice will be published in late 2005 or early 2006 in the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/> and will be announced in Science and in other journals. We will also provide information on the Pioneer Award website.

To receive notification of this and other NIH Roadmap news, register for the NIH Roadmap LISTSERV at <http://list.nih.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=nihr roadmap-l&A=1>.

Finalist Interviews (Phase 3) *New!*

I submitted an application for Phase 2. When will I learn if I have been selected for Phase 3?

Applicants for Phase 2 will be contacted by telephone or by email during the first week in August.

If I am not selected for Phase 3 (interview), will I receive a summary statement or other comments?

Summary statements or other comments will not be provided to either successful or unsuccessful applicants.

If I am not selected for Phase 3, may I submit an appeal?

There is no appeal process for the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards. You may, however, submit another nomination next year.

When will the finalist interviews be held?

The Finalist Interviews will take place on August 29, 30, and 31, 2005 in Bethesda.

When will the 2005 awardees be announced?

The 2005 NIH Director's Pioneer Award recipients will be announced at the [NIH Director's Pioneer Award Symposium on September 29, 2005](#).

Evaluation (Phase 2)

I submitted a nomination for a Pioneer Award. When will I learn whether I will be invited to apply for Phase 2?

On or about May 20, 2005, you will receive electronic notification of the outcome of the Phase I evaluation. Nominees will be informed either that they have or have not been selected to proceed to Phase 2.

Will I receive a summary statement or other comments?

Successful and unsuccessful nominees will not receive a summary statement or other comments.

If I am not selected to apply for Phase 2, may I submit an appeal?

There is no appeal process for the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards. You may, however, submit another nomination next year.

If I am selected to apply for Phase 2, what information is required?

The electronic notification that you receive will explain what information is needed and how to submit this information through the Grants.gov Web site, a process distinct from what you used to submit the Phase 1 nominations. Briefly, you and your institution will be asked to provide standard application information. You will also be asked to provide an example of your most significant accomplishment, which can be in the form of a publication or in a different format. The people you designated as references will also need to provide letters on your behalf.

May I submit more than one publication or accomplishment with my application?

No. Applications that contain more than one submission will not be considered responsive.

May I provide an explanation for my selected accomplishment?

No. We can only accept the publication or other accomplishment.

If I am selected to apply for Phase 2, how will the people I designated as references be notified to submit letters on my behalf?

The three individuals that you designated will be notified electronically and will be instructed on how to submit the letters electronically.

How will I know that they have submitted the letters?

You will receive a URL for a secure Web site, log-in information, and instructions that will enable you to monitor receipt of the letters.

I have been asked to submit a reference on behalf of one of the nominees. What information should I provide?

The format for the letters of reference can be found at <http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/pioneer/LettersofReference.aspx>.

What are the deadlines for submission of the Phase 2 application and for the letters of reference?

The deadlines for submission of the Phase 2 application and the letters of reference are 5:00 p.m. EDT on June 10, 2005.

Can I request an extension?

No. There will be no exceptions to the deadlines. Applications that have not been received by the deadline, that are incomplete, or that are missing one or more letters of reference will not be reviewed.

How will the Phase 2 applications be reviewed?

Phase 2 applications, which will include the material submitted in the nomination, the candidate's most significant accomplishment, and the letters of reference, will be evaluated electronically by a group of distinguished scientists. The names of the evaluators will be posted on the Pioneer Award Web site when the Phase 2 evaluations begin.

How and according to what schedule will awardees be selected?

Phase 2 applications are to be submitted in mid-June 2005. Outside experts will evaluate all of the submitted information and recommend a subset of candidates who will be invited to NIH for interviews. These candidates will be interviewed in August-September 2005 by a panel of distinguished outside experts. The final level of review will be conducted by the Advisory Committee to the Director, NIH, which will make recommendations to the Director, NIH, based on the evaluations by outside experts and programmatic considerations.

What are the evaluation criteria?

The evaluation criteria, which can be found at <http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/pioneer/evaluationprocess.aspx>, are the same as were used for Phase 1.

If I am invited to submit an application for Phase 2, when will I be notified about the outcome?

Applicants for Phase 2 will be notified at the end of July whether they have been selected to come to NIH for interviews.

General Questions

Why has the NIH Director established the NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

Many scientists who participated in the development of the NIH Roadmap expressed the view that a new program might be necessary to identify scientists with ideas that have the potential for high impact, but that may be too novel, span too diverse a range of disciplines, or be at a stage too early to fare well in the traditional peer review process. In response, NIH launched the NIH Director's Pioneer Award (NDPA) Program in 2004. This program is meant to complement NIH's traditional, investigator-initiated grant programs by supporting individual scientists of exceptional creativity who propose pioneering approaches to major contemporary challenges in biomedical research. The term "pioneering" is used to describe highly innovative approaches that have the potential for producing an unusually high impact. Biomedical research is defined broadly in this program as encompassing scientific investigations in the biological, behavioral, clinical, social, physical, chemical, computational, engineering, mathematical sciences, and other relevant disciplines.

What distinguishes the NIH Director's Pioneer Award from other NIH programs?

The NIH Director's Pioneer Award Program is different in several ways. First, it is designed to support people with uniquely creative ideas, rather than projects. The award will provide up to \$500,000 direct costs per year for five years to a select few exceptionally creative investigators, to pursue innovative, pioneering research with the potential to produce tomorrow's conceptual and technological breakthroughs. The only constraint on the research to be done with this award is that it must be relevant to the NIH mission (<http://www.nih.gov/about/almanac/>). Second, candidates must initially nominate themselves and then be invited to apply. Third, the information required in the nomination and application process is highly abbreviated, and turnaround is accelerated. Fourth, the procedure for evaluating applicants (described below) is distinct from the traditional NIH peer review, "study section" process and will be based on review of the individual's potential to make seminal contributions toward solving an important biomedical research problem. Biomedical research is defined broadly in this program as encompassing scientific investigations in the biological, behavioral, clinical, social, physical, chemical, computational, engineering, and mathematical sciences.

How will the program be administered?

The NIH Director's Pioneer Award Program will be administered separately from all other research grant programs. Staff of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences will administer the program on behalf of the NIH Office of the Director.

Who may nominate candidates for the NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

Candidates must nominate themselves. Nominations will not be accepted from colleagues, mentors, or institutions.

How and when may nominations be submitted? Will late nominations be accepted in extenuating circumstances?

The nomination period was from March 1, 2005 through 5 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, April 1, 2005. To maintain equity, no late nominations will be accepted.

What is the application and selection process?

The application and selection processes are described in more detail below. Individuals initially nominate themselves for the award (Phase 1), and those judged to be most competitive will be invited to apply (Phase 2). In Phase 2, the list of applicants will be narrowed to a short list of approximately 20. A highly distinguished panel will assess these candidates based on personal interviews and presentations. The Advisory Committee to the Director, NIH, will provide additional programmatic input regarding these assessments before the Director, NIH, makes final selections.

What criteria will be used to assess nominees?

The evaluators are looking for convincing evidence that the nominee will pursue a pioneering approach to a problem of relevance to biomedical research. They will also assess whether alternative funding is already available to pursue this direction and whether there is compelling justification for the advantage of using the NPDA process rather than the standard peer review process.

Can the decision of the panel of assessors be appealed?

No. There is no appeal process.

How many awards will be made in 2005? Will additional awards be made in subsequent years?

The NIH Director expects to make 5 to 10 awards in FY 2005, depending on the quality of applications and the availability of funds. Additional awards will be made in each of Fiscal Years 2006-2008. Because of the experimental nature of the program, systematic evaluation will be a critical element of what is intended to be a demonstration project. In order to evaluate the program and its outcomes, nominees, applicants, and awardees may be contacted to provide a limited amount of follow-up information. Making new awards after FY 2008 is dependent on evaluation of the program.

Are these awards renewable?

No. These awards are intended to jump-start or redirect an individual's research program. Awardees are expected to seek future support through traditional routes.

From which disciplines does NIH wish to draw nominees for the NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

The NIH encourages the nomination of scientists from all disciplines, including the biological, behavioral, clinical, social, physical, chemical, computational, engineering, and mathematical sciences, who provide evidence of interest in exploring topics of relevance to the NIH mission.

Some people have criticized the outcome of the 2004 Pioneer Awards because none of the awards went to women, and women were not well represented among the evaluators. What is being done to address this situation in 2005?

The NIH recognizes that there are many outstanding and highly innovative women scientists, as well as outstanding scientists who are members of minority groups underrepresented in biomedical research, and strongly encourages these individuals to nominate themselves. NIH is increasing its outreach through advertisements and notices to scientific organizations. NIH also plans to aggressively recruit an appropriately diverse group to serve as evaluators at the various stages of the selection process.

How much time/effort are recipients expected to devote?

Awardees are expected to commit the major portion (at least 51 percent) of their research effort to activities supported by the NDPA.

Can failed applicants nominate themselves in subsequent years?

Yes, as long as they meet the other eligibility criteria.

How will this award be managed by NIH?

The award will be administered by the staff of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences on behalf of the NIH Office of the Director.

What post-award requirements must I fulfill?

Although there are no stipulations on the research agenda, you will be required to submit a two to five page annual report of your activities during the year and to participate in an annual symposium in Bethesda, MD. In addition, to help the NIH evaluate this program, you will be contacted periodically for at least five years and asked to report on your latest research efforts.

How many nominations were submitted in 2005?

Approximately 840 nominations were submitted for the 2005 award.

Of the nominations that were submitted in 2005, how many were invited to apply for Phase 2?

Two hundred and eighty-five investigators were invited to submit Phase 2 applications.

Eligibility

Are individuals at all stages of their careers eligible?

Yes, individuals at all career stages are eligible to nominate themselves. Those at early to middle stages of their careers, and women and members of groups underrepresented in biomedical research are especially encouraged to nominate themselves.

Are foreign scientists eligible?

No. Nominees must either be U.S. citizens, non-citizen nationals, or permanent residents of the United States. However, U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United States who are employed in foreign institutions are eligible.

I am foreign scientist working in the U.S., and I have applied for a green card. Am I eligible?

You must be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or permanent resident of the United States at the time of submission of your nomination. Holders of temporary visas are not eligible to submit a nomination.

Are individuals employed by government agencies, non-academic, and/or for-profit organizations eligible?

Individuals from all organizations that can otherwise apply to the NIH for funding and are willing to abide by the terms and conditions that NIH requires are eligible for this award.

Are scientists in the NIH Intramural Program eligible?

No. Because intramural scientists may not receive extramural NIH grants, they may not nominate themselves for an NIH Director's Pioneer Award.

Are individuals who have other support eligible? If so, may the awardee remain as principal investigator on his/her grant(s)?

Individuals who have other support are eligible for this award and may continue as principal investigator on other grants. However, awardees are expected to devote at least 51 percent of their time/effort to this work. Since the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards are expected to support distinctly new research, awards will not be made simply to enable investigators to expand research projects that are ongoing.

I am currently a postdoctoral fellow. Am I eligible to nominate myself for an NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

Nominees must be able to show concrete evidence for their claim of innovativeness. This could be very difficult for a postdoctoral fellow who has never conducted independent research. In addition, like all NIH grants, the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards are made to institutions on behalf of investigators. Because most institutions will only authorize grant applications from individuals who are independent investigators, this could present an administrative barrier to a postdoctoral fellow nominating him- or herself.

May two or more scientists nominate themselves as a team for the NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

Since the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards are meant to support a person, not a specific project, nominations must come from individual investigators, not from teams of investigators. Scientists with long-standing collaborations have a couple of options. One is for each investigator to submit a nomination and, in the essay, explain the scientific relationship. If the applications of both investigators are successful, the collaborators could share the award. A second option is for one of the investigators to nominate him- or herself and to explain that, should the award be made, the other person would be a collaborator.

Nomination (Phase 1) (ended 4/1/05)

What information must I provide?

The nomination package must include the following information.

- The general category or categories of research the nominee will address. The nominee should select one or more: Behavioral and Social Science; Clinical Research; Instrumentation and Engineering; Molecular and Cellular Biology; Pathogenesis and Epidemiology; Physiological and Integrative Systems; or Quantitative and Mathematical Biology. If none of the categories is appropriate, the nominee should select Other and specify a category. Category selection will assist staff in assigning nominations to evaluators.
- An essay of three to five pages that addresses the nominee's innovative vision for, and the significance of, the biomedical problem to be addressed, and his/her qualifications to engage in groundbreaking research. The essay should describe the nominee's view of the major challenges in biomedical research to which he/she can make seminal contributions. No detailed scientific plan should be provided since the research plan is expected to evolve during the tenure of the grant. As part of the essay, nominees should include answers to all of the following questions:
 - What is the scientific problem that the nominee will address, and why is this important?
 - What are the pioneering, and possibly high-risk, approaches that, if successful, might lead to groundbreaking results?
 - What concrete evidence can the nominee provide for his or her claim of innovativeness? For example, qualities common to many highly innovative people include an interest in, and the ability to integrate, diverse sources of information; an inclination to challenge paradigms and take intellectual risks; persistence in the face of failure; an ability to attract the right collaborators; and the energy and concentration necessary to plan and execute effective strategies for accomplishing goals.
 - How will the new research direction differ from the nominee's past or current work?
 - Why does the nature of the research favor the NDPA selection process over the standard peer review process? The fact that a study section has described a proposed project as "risky" is not a sufficient rationale.
- A two-page biographical sketch
- A list of current research support from all sources with a brief description of each supported project
- The names and complete contact information, including an e-mail address, for three references, from whom the nominee will request letters of support if he/she is selected to proceed to Phase 2 of the selection process (see [Format for Letters of Reference](#))
- An optional form including personal data to assist NIH in a prospective analysis of the NDPA program.

Text should be in 12-point font. Pages should be numbered with the nominee's name included at the top of each page.

Why is personal data being requested?

The Public Health Service has a continuing commitment to monitor the operation of its review and award processes to detect – and deal appropriately with – any instances of real or apparent inequities with respect to age, sex, race, or ethnicity of the proposed awardees. The Personal Data Form will be

stored separately from the rest of the nomination information. It will not be used as part of any stage of the evaluation. Data will be confidential and will be maintained in Privacy Act record system 09-25-0036, "Grants:IMPAC (Grant/Contract Information)." All analyses conducted on the date of birth, gender, race and/or ethnic origin data will report aggregate statistical findings only and will not identify individuals. If you decline to provide this information, it will no in way affect consideration of your application.

Are there any system requirements for submitting my nomination?

Nominations can be submitted from both PC's and Macintosh computers. We suggest that you use Internet Explorer as your web browser. We have had reports that nominees have not been able to submit nominations using other web browsers.

Do I have to log in to submit a nomination?

No. The "log in" is only used by Pioneer Award staff and evaluators. To submit a nomination, complete the [nomination form](#).

In my essay may I include citations to key publications? If so, what is the appropriate format?

Yes. You may include citations in the essay, as long as they fit within the three to five page limit. The citations can be in any format.

In my essay, may I include figures and illustrations?

Yes. You may include figures and illustrations in the essay, as long as they fit within the three to five page limit and do not cause the document to exceed 5 MB. The nomination form will not accept documents that exceed 5 MB.

After I hit the "Submit Nomination" button nothing happened, and I did not receive a confirmation that my nomination had been received. What should I do now?

Ensure that the nomination form is complete, that all PDF files are below 5MB, and try resubmitting your nomination using Internet Explorer as your web browser.

I have submitted my nomination and would like to see the information and PDF files that were submitted. How can I do this?

We regret that it is not possible to review a nomination after it has been submitted.

I have submitted my nomination and have just realized that there were errors in my essay/biographical sketch/list of research support. May I submit a revised version?

Due to the large number of nominations, revisions cannot be accepted except under the most extenuating circumstances. Examples of extenuating circumstances that might be considered are the discovery that an unintended file was sent or that an entire page of a document is missing. In such cases, contact pioneer@nih.gov. Revisions that are meant to correct typographical errors or to add new information will not be accepted.

How will nominees be assured that the nomination package has been received and is complete?

Nominees will receive electronic confirmation that the complete package has been received.

How will invited applicants be identified?

The review of the nominations is a two-stage process. NIH staff will first screen each nomination package to identify those nominees deemed eligible. (See question on eligibility criteria above.) Those found ineligible will be notified electronically of the disposition of their nomination. Nomination packages of the competitive nominees will then be evaluated by external experts drawn from a multidisciplinary cadre of researchers who are highly regarded in their fields and who are supportive of encouraging of pioneering research. The evaluators will be charged with identifying the most highly competitive individuals to be invited to submit applications. In mid-May 2005, nominees will be notified regarding the outcome of the Phase 1 selection process. Those who are selected to submit applications will be given instructions.

Can the decision of the panel of assessors be appealed?

No. There is no appeal process.

If I am invited to apply, what information must I provide?

An individual selected to proceed to Phase 2 must submit a copy of his/her most significant publication or achievement.

Individuals who are selected must also arrange for direct submission to NIH of letters of support from the three references whose names were provided in the initial nomination package. Instructions for submitting the information required for Phase 2 will be provided. Please refer to [Format for Letters of Reference](#).